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ABSTRACT

An overview is offered on the development of a drama unit for middle and junior high school language arts classrooms. A time line of the play unit is presented, indicating a sequence of learning and stage production activities. Appendixes contain sample materials for use during the six-week unit, including signup sheets, a writing assignment on character analysis, a quiz on makeup and character analysis, a vocabulary quiz, a quiz on play production terms and spelling, a play production test, a postproduction evaluation form, and lists of plays, references, and resources. (RL)

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DESIGN AND IMPLEMENTATION OF AN EFFECTIVE DRAMA UNIT FOR MIDDLE SCHOOL/JUNIOR HIGH

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DESIGN AND IMPLEMENTATION OF AN EFFECTIVE DRAMA UNIT
FOR
MIDDLE SCHOOL/JUNIOR HIGH

The last six weeks of the school year in 7th and 8th grade in Language Arts can be very conducive to learning when basics and fun are integrated together in a drama unit.

Keeping in mind that spring is a difficult time of the year to introduce any new concepts to students, I decided to write and develop a drama unit in which the students could receive a basic background in the elements of putting a theatrical production together and receive an appreciation of the theater arts by actually producing and performing a one-act play.

Finding five non-royalty one-act plays for five classes each year, without repeating the same plays, isn't an easy task. Teenage Comedies for Amateur Stage, Play Magazine and Selected Plays from Art Craft Company have been valuable resources in this area. We basically select and tailor the plays chosen for each particular class on the basis of the abilities exhibited by the students in those classes.

Having essentially no budget to work with has been a bit of a problem, but asking the students to donate 25¢ apiece to buy stage make-up, and other items has helped to defray costs. Also, being able to use the high school flats has helped, although it's not a necessity in junior high productions. The absence of flats necessitates increased creativity on the students' part.

The average number of students per class was 25 and has grown to 50 with the involvement of the 8th grade Language Arts teacher. The addition of this extra professional has opened a team approach to the project. In this particular situation, our expertise and personalities mesh well, but this will not always be the case in a teaching situation. Such a relaticnship, however, is necessary if the teaming is to be a success.

While the prospect of having some 50 junior high students actively involved in some phase of theatrical production might appear appalling at face value, we found that it can be a benefit, in that now, rather than having to rely on one or two students working on a particular aspect of the production, teams of three or four can pool each person's special talents to produce an even better product. And, in fact, the quality of my productions has improved since adopting the teaming format.

Being close to a university has the advantages of having guest speakers and guest demonstrations in various aspects of stage make-up, lighting, etc. If a university is not available, similar outside help can be gained through contacting local or nearby community play houses, actors' workshops, etc.

A time line of our play unit that we follow from the beginning of the unit to production day is presented below:

1. The first week, students read through the plays a couple of times and write definitions of vocabulary found in their particular play. They are then quizzed over the vocabulary content. The films, "Theater - One of the Humanities" and "Why Man Creates" are also shown.

2. During the second week, a basic straight and old-age make-up demonstration is given by myself or a guest demonstrator from Iowa State University's Make-up Department. The films "Mime of Marcel Marceau" and "What's in a Play - Dramatic Action" are shown. Basics of pantomime and improvisations are explained and practiced. The students then make individual and group presentations.

3. During the third week, two days are spent in the auditorium learning stage direction and covering other areas such as lights, sets, costuming and duties of various crews. The next two days are spent having tryouts and signing up crews. Having accomplished this, we are then ready for reading rehearsal.

4. The following two weeks everyone is involved in numerous activities such as blocking and rehearsing the plays, designing and building the sets, designing posters and programs, and deciding various costuming, props and make-up to be used, and getting lighting and sound coordinated.

5. During the sixth and final week, two days of dress rehearsal are given, and the unit climaxes with the final performances of our five plays on the same day.

6. The next day we "strike" the stage and return all costumes and props. Then we have our own "Academy Awards" with the students voting on "Best Play Overall", "Best Actor and Actress Overall" and "Best Actor and Actress" from their own class play.

Many basic skills of Language Arts are reinforced throughout the unit. Among the numerous skills that are introduced for the first time, is the development of vocabulary through the acquisition and use of new theatrical terms. Spelling skills are strengthened, in that, spelling words are taken from the various terms they are using. Reading comprehension is worked on through joint reading exercises and questions to develop thorough understandings of the plays. Analytical and writing skills are enhanced when, as part of the unit, the students are required to do in-depth character analyses, make-up character anaylses and newspaper releases.

In these times of increasing calls for accountability in education, a unit such as ours, must still be evaluated through some systematic means. For our unit, several devices are used to meet this evaluative need.

The students fill out an evaluation form weekly on each other's performance during that time. The Stage Manager is responsible for evaluating the crew heads, and the crew heads are responsible for evaluating the crew members. In like manner, the Student Director evaluates the actors, while the instructor evaluates the Stage Manager and the Student Director.

Through the use of performance grades and quiz scores from in-class presentations on theater, i.e., stage make-up, lighting, stage direction and terminology, the instructors have good evaluation tools. Students evaluate plays overall and give comments about the unit which helps us to improve the unit the following year.

I see this play unit as being an integral part of our Language Arts Program with the following benefits:

The students are able to reinforce the Language Arts skills learned throughout the year by putting them to practical use in this unit, as opposed to doing exercises from a book.

One unexpected benefit is that students, who may otherwise have difficulty in experiencing success in more traditional, academic endeavors throughout the year, have consistently met with success in this program. This feeling, in part, has been generated by the students' older brothers and sisters who have, in many cases, "clued them in" to our unit.

It is capable of sparking enough interest in theater so that students may develop a lifelong interest and appreciation for theatrical productions.

It is the kind of activity that can be given considerable media coverage, resulting in the increased interest and support of the community, which is vital to all school districts.

Those last six weeks of the school year, so often dreaded by many teachers and students, need not be! Indeed, I find them to be a time that I eagerly look forward to as being the high point of my year.

APPENDICES

TRY-OUT SHEET

Name _____

Production Title _____

Grade _____

List in order of preference what role you want:

1.

2.

3.

Check any/all backstage crews you would like to be on:

____ Set Crew	____ Props
____ Light Crew	____ Prompter
____ Costumes	____ Sound Crew
____ Make-Up	____ Student Director
____ Programs & Posers	____ Stage Manager

****

Director's Comments

CHARACTER ANALYSIS

Use the following to write a detailed analysis of your character. Base your analysis on a thorough reading of the entire script.

1. Make a list of all of the adjectives that you can think of which might be used to describe the character.

2. What is the character's relationship with the other major characters in the play?

3. Give a brief physical description of the character.

4. Can you think of someone who might look or act like your character?

5. What does the character say about himself/herself?

6. What do the other characters say about him/her?

7. Describe in detail, the character's life from birth to the present (or even until death, if you prefer). Write about the life they've lived and give specific details of their background.

8. Start a list of facts about your character.

CHARACTER ANALYSIS SHEETS ARE DUE ON _____.

THIS IS ALSO YOUR LINE DATE ----- HAVE YOUR LINES MEMORIZED!

MAKE-UP CHARACTER ANALYSIS

Find the answers to this list of questions before you begin to develop your make-up. Write an analysis of your character by finding the answers in the script.

1. Who is this character?
2. How old is this character?
3. How tall is this character?
4. Does this character have any unusual features? If so, specify.
5. In what things is this character most interested?
6. What does this character do in his/her spare time?
7. Does this character dress neatly or carelessly?
8. What is the character's posture like?
9. What education has this character had? His/her occupation?
10. Is this character in good health? If not, what is the cause of their illness?
11. What kind of disposition does this character have?
12. What is the character's personality?
13. Is this character single, married or divorced? Any children?
14. What kind of life has this character had? In what type or kind of home does he/she live?

Consider the heredity, race, environment, and sex of this character when designing the make-up for him/her.

6th period
Vocabulary Quiz over play

Name _____

"Let Maizie Do It"

1. _____ chaos
2. _____ tactical
3. _____ excerpt
4. _____ seance
5. _____ temperamental
6. _____ catastrophes
7. _____ fumigated
8. _____ promotional
9. _____ sparse
10. _____ superbly
11. _____ eternal
12. _____ extol
13. _____ lineage
14. _____ masculine

A. manly; characteristic of or belonging to men

B. thinly scattered

C. disinfected with fumes

D. not listed

E. magnificently; stately

F. praise highly

G. a planned action for gaining an end or reaching a goal

H. the helping along of something to success

I. a selected passage

J. lasting throughout all time

K. a sudden, widespread or extraordinary disaster

L. the line of descendants from a common ancestor

M. sensitive; easily irritated

N. great confusion; complete disorder

O. a meeting of people trying to communicate with spirits of the dead with the help of a medium

P. Protagonist

Name_____

Play Production Terms and Spelling

Fill in the blanks with the appropriate words and spell each of them correctly.

1. _____ dealing with mechanical aspects of the play

2. _____ practice session to prepare for public performance

3. _____ increase voice or actions so they will carry to audience

4. _____ a public presentation

5. _____ interprets the play

6. _____ movement and gestures without words

7. _____ light, amusing play with a happy ending

8. _____ you are given a situation in which you must make up dialogue and action as you play our the scene

9. _____ center all your attention on someone or something

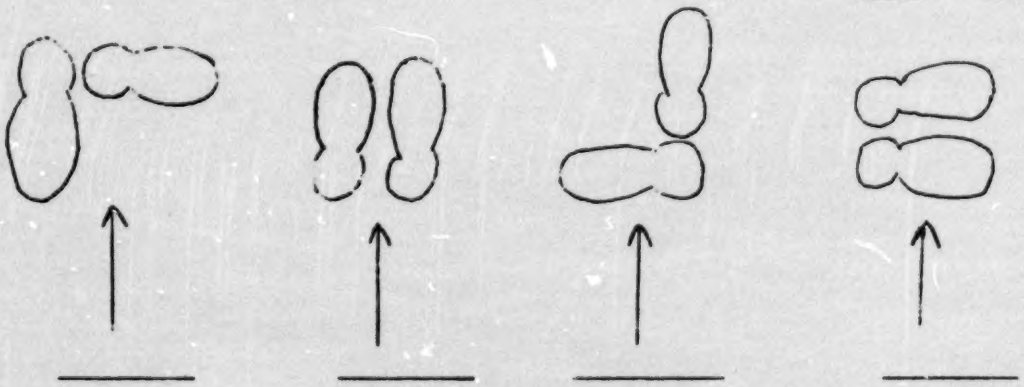
10. _____ serious drama in which the hero can't overcome obstacles; usually sad ending

NAME _____

PLAY PRODUCTION TEST

1. Label the directions on the stage:

2. Label the following body positions on stage. Be sure to state <u>right</u> or <u>left</u> also.



Fill in the blanks with the appropriate words and spell each of them correctly.

3. _____ practice session to prepare for public performance

4. _____ increase voice or actions so they will carry to the audience.

5. _____ interprets the play

6. _____ movement and gestures without words

7. _____ you are given a situation in which you must make up dialogue and action as you play out the scene

1. List the four basic make-up types:
   1.
   2.
   3.
   4.

2. Name two types of make-up <u>base</u> that we can use:
   1. 2.

3. Name 4 major techniques or items we use in creating a make-up for a stage production:
   1. 2.
   3. 4.

4. List three stage crews and briefly explain their responsibilities:
   1.

   2.

   3.

5. Why do we powder after we make-up an actor?

6. List the six basic steps in make-up application:
   1.
   2.
   3.
   4.
   5.
   6.

7. Explain the difference between a <u>hand</u> prop and a <u>set</u> prop.

Matching

1.	_____	to take attention away from another actor	a. upstage
2.	_____	area farthest away from the audience	b. downstage
3.	_____	one of the persons in the play	c. audience
4.	_____	an assembly of listeners or spectators	d. character
5.	_____	area closest to the audience	e. on stage
6.	_____	any area where the audience can see you	f. make-up
7.	_____	side view	g. profile
8.	_____	cosmetics for the face	h. steal
9.	_____	X - a directed movement on stage	i. cross
10.	_____	any area where the audience can't see you	k. backstage
11.	_____	turn more of the actor's body toward the audience	l. cover
12.	_____	take down set and props after performance	m. block
13.	_____	any item that can be carried on stage	n. ease-down
14.	_____	a way to "steal" a counter cross	o. above
15.	_____	to go downstage	p. off stage
16.	_____	to stand between another actor and the audience	q. below
17.	_____	to go upstage	r. open up
18.	_____	area behind scenery not visible to audience	s. properties
19.	_____	directions, given by the director, to actors concerning their movements on stage	t. strike

EVALUATION FORM

Evaluate each member of your crew using this scale:

0 = Did Nothing
1 = Average
2 = Did a Lot

Name of Crew Member being evaluated: _____

This crew member:

1. Shows cooperative attitude toward crew duties, and willingness to work.

   0 1 2

2. Carries out responsibility on time.

   0 1 2

3. Contributes ideas, effort (input).

   0 1 2

4. Is dependable.

   0 1 2

5. Follows directions, cooperates with you.

   0 1 2

6. Cooperates with other crew members.

   0 1 2

7. Does fair share; doesn't leave duties to everybody else.

   0 1 2

Additonal Comments:

Your class period 1 2 4 6 7 (Circle yours)

Best actor (from your play) _____

Best actress (from your play) _____

Best play (overall) _____

Best actor (overall) _____

Best actress (overall) _____

Comments on the play unit:

Your class period 1 2 4 6 7 (Circle yours)

Best actor (from your play) _____

Best actress (from your play) _____

Best play (overall) _____

Best actor (overall) _____

Best actress (overall) _____

Comments on the play unit:

Some of the Plays that we have used successfully are:

Teenage Comedies for the Amateur Stage - Betty Tracy Huff

"Too Many Cooks"
"The Case of the Missing Masterpiece"
"Meet Mr. Murchinson"
"Chef's Special"

Plays Magazine

"Just Plain Folks" - Margaret Malkind
"A Test for Three Detectives" - John Murray
"The Haunting of Hathaway House" - John Murray

Selected Plays - Art Craft Company

Le Roma Greth - "Ghost for Rent"
"The Ghost at Punkin Holler"

Donald Payton - "He Tried With His Boots On"
"Life O' the Party"
"Foxy Grandma"

R. A. Anderson & R. L. Sweeney - "Run Robber Run"
"Boris and the Briefcase"

RESOURCES

Books

Corson, Richard. Stage Make-up. Englewood Cliffs: Prentice-Hall, Inc., 1970.

Huff, Betty T. Teenage Comedies for the Amateur Stage. Boston, Mass.: Plays, Inc., 1968.

Hunt, Douglas and Kari. Pantomime: Silent Theater. New York: Atheneum, 1964.

Kipnis, Claude. The Mime Book. New York: Harper and Row, 1974.

Speech 495: Teaching Speech students. Effective Teaching Collection. Unpublished Resource Book. Iowa State University, 1978.

Tanner, Fran A. Basic Drama. Pocatello, Idaho: Clark Publishing Co., 1972.

Tanner, Fran A. Creative Communication. Pocatello, Idaho: Clark Publishing Co., 1972.

Films

"Mime of Marcel Marceau". Learning Corporation of America, 1972.

"Theatre--One of the Humanities". Encyclopaedia Britannica Educational Corporation, 1959.

"What's in a Play--Dramatic Action". BFA Educational Media, 1967.

"Why Man Creates". Pyramid, 1968.

Periodicals

Selected Plays. Cedar Rapids, Iowa: Art Craft Play Co.

Plays, The Drama Magazine for Young People. Boston, Mass.: Plays, Inc.

Speakers and Demonstrations

Iowa State University Theater Department. Iowa State University, Ames, Iowa.